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AUTHOR Bell, David; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Data from 202 out of 311 surveyed school districts in Arkansas were collected to assess the congruence of course content guides, developed under administrative mandate by the school districts, with associated parental reporting forms. The guides outline skills associated with three instructional/skill levels--basic, developmental, and extensions--within each subject area at each grade level. Skills are measured by the Minimum Performance Test, given each year to students in third, sixth, and eighth grades. Promotion from the eighth grade depends upon mastery of the basic skills listed in the five content guides for reading, mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. Teachers must report each child's progress to parents via a form created by the school. Results of the survey indicate that: (1) 99% of the schools used some form or letter for reporting; (2) 42% used a combination of letter grades and percentage grades; (3) 57% used letter grades only; (4) one school used a parent conference form instead of a report card; and (5) two schools used a computer in reporting grades to parents. In general, the reporting forms were not congruent with the expressions used in the course content guides.
(TJH)

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CURRICULUM MAPPING: CONGRUENCE OF ARKANSAS COURSE CONTENT GUIDES AND REPORTING FORMS

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Paper Presented by:

David Bell
Arkansas Tech University
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

Robert Calvery
Southside School District
70 Scott Drive
Batesville, Arkansas 72501

Georgine Steinmiller
Henderson State University
Arkadelphia, Arkansas 71923

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CURRICULUM MAPPING: CONGRUENCE OF ARKANSAS COURSE CONTENT GUIDES AND REPORTING FORMS

Introduction

The Standards for accreditation of Public Schools, adopted by the Arkansas State Board of Education in 1983, required the development of Course Content Guides. Committees of classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, staff members from higher education and the Department of Education personnel jointly identified the skills for the Course Content Guides. Within each subject area and at each grade level, skills were identified at three instructional levels: basic, developmental, and extensions. The basic skills are those skills which all students must master. Developmental skills are those skills beyond the basic level that should be taught, but not necessarily mastered by all learners. Extension skills stress the higher order thinking, processing and problem solving skills.

These skills can be measured by the Minimum Performance Test. The Minimum Performance Test is given each year to students in grades three, six, and eight. This Minimum Performance Test is coordinated with the basic skills in the Course Content Guides. The Minimum Performance Test measures a student's mastery of basic skills. Promotion from the eighth grade depends upon mastery of the basic skills listed in the five content guides for reading, mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies.

The test results are reported to parents. This reporting is a special form of communicating. The teacher's role in this process is reporting the child's progress to the parents. The test results are written on a form created by the school. In 1989, the Phi Delta Kappan conducted a

survey that dealt with report grading. In this survey, parents of children enrolled in the public schools were asked about student reports. They were asked, "Could they be more helpful?" Thirty-two percent of the parents who were polled said they were dissatisfied with present report forms. They were asked what kind of information they would like to have included in the report form. The number one suggestion was more detailed information, not just grades. The implementation of the state required Course Content Guides of basic skills and reporting forms justified the purpose of the study.

Purpose

In this study, the reporting forms were compared with the Course Content Guides to determine if the wording of the skills evaluated on the reporting forms were consistent with the wording of the basic skills in the Course Content Guides in grade levels first, second, and third.

Procedures

Data were collected from 202 school districts in Arkansas. Information was sought from 311 school districts with a return rate of sixty-five percent. The information was taken from first, second, and third grade levels. The report cards were compared to the basic skills for first, second, and third grade in the Course Content Guides. The basic skills that students are tested for on these grade levels are math, reading, and language.

Reporting Forms

Data collected from 202 schools indicated that ninety-nine percent used some form of letter grades. Forty-two percent used a combination of letter and percentage grades, fifty-seven percent used letter grades only, and one school used a parent conference form instead of a report card. Two schools reported using a computer in reporting grades to parents.

A little more than three fourths or seventy-six percent used letter grades A's, B's, C's, D's, and F's. The next most commonly used grading system was the S, N, U, (Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, Unsatisfactory). Four percent of the schools surveyed used these letters.

Most schools that reported percentage grades gave 90 to 100 as an A. Thirty-five out of 202 schools, or seventeen percent, used this range for an A. Seventeen schools, or eight percent, used 94 to 100 as an A. Fifteen schools, or seven percent, used 95-100 as an A. Thirteen schools, or six percent, used 93 to 100 as an A. Three schools, or one percent, used 92 to 100 as an A.

Course Content Skills

Data collected from 202 schools indicated that the most commonly used words on the report cards were reading sixty-seven percent, language seventy-one percent, and arithmetic sixty-eight percent.

Reading

Under the basic skill of reading, the expressions reads with understanding, vocabulary, readiness, sounds with letter, applies phonics, and works out new words are used inconsistently by most school districts. The expressions, reading with understanding was used by twenty-three percent, vocabulary was used by eleven percent, readiness by eight percent, sounds with letters by seven percent, applies phonics by six percent, and works out new words by fourteen percent. Three expressions were actually found to correlate with the reading basic skills Course Content Guide. They were as follows:

1. demonstrates the ability to read a selection silently and answer questions by three percent;
2. develops the skill to read orally for the enjoyment of others by eight percent;

3. selects books for independent reading by nine percent.

Mathematics

Under the basic skill of mathematics, the expressions knows or uses number facts, accuracy, problem solving application, and money or time concepts were used inconsistently by most schools. The words knows or uses number facts were used by twenty-three percent, accuracy by ten percent, problem solving by fifteen percent, and money or time concepts by eight percent.

There were six expressions on the report cards that correlated with the basic skills Course Content Guide for mathematics. They were as follows:

1. write any number between 0-99 without a model by five percent;
2. rote count to 100 by three percent;
3. orally read numerals to 99 by two percent;
4. solve problems involving basic subtraction facts by one percent;
5. tell and write time to the hour by one school only;
6. identify a penny, nickel, dime, and quarter, and its value by one school only.

Language

Under the basic skill of language, the expressions speaks clearly and correctly, punctuation, grammar, expresses ideas in writing, and capitalization were used randomly by most school districts. The expression speaks clearly and correctly was used by seventeen percent, punctuation by twelve percent, grammar by eleven percent, expresses ideas in writing by twelve percent, and capitalization by ten percent. No basic skills Course Content Guide descriptions were found on any report cards in language.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, most school districts in Arkansas use letter grades in reporting grades to parents. Three fourths use the letter grades A, B, C, D, and F. Of those schools using percentage grades 90-100 occurred most frequently as representing an A.

In comparing the Course Content Guides with the wording on the report card, the following results were noted. On the report cards surveyed, only three expressions from the Course Content Guides were found in reading, six math expressions were found, and no language expressions were found. Only one school out of 311 used a report card that listed all the basic skills found in the Course Content guides for reading, math and language.